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INJECTION DRUG USERS AND THEIR SEX/NEEDLE-SHARING PARTNERS

What you should know:

- Injection drug use is the second leading cause of HIV transmission and the leading cause of hepatitis C (HCV) infection in California.
- Injection drug users (IDUs) continue to be at high risk for HIV and hepatitis infection in California.
- Sharing of contaminated syringes and other injection equipment is linked to 20 percent of all reported AIDS cases in the state.
- California data suggests that over 1,500 new syringe-sharing HIV infections occur annually.
- The link between injection drug use and HIV in California is particularly strong for women and people of color.
- Among adult/adolescent women in California, injection drug use-related risk factors account for 37 percent of cumulative AIDS cases. Forty-six percent of AIDS cases among African American women and 55 percent of AIDS cases among Native American women are associated with injection drug use, compared to 40 percent of AIDS cases among White women.

What we do:

To better address the HIV prevention needs of IDUs and their sex/needle-sharing partners, the California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS (CDHS/OA) funds two programs that focus on the needs of IDUs: The Injection Drug User HIV Testing Utilizing Hepatitis C Testing High-Risk Initiative, which is discussed in the HCV fact sheet and *Peer-Based HIV Prevention Among Injection Drug Users and Satellite Syringe Exchangers in California* discussed below.

Scientific research has demonstrated that syringe exchange programs (SEPs) are effective in reducing blood-borne disease transmission and do not increase drug use or crime rates. However, due to fear of community stigma, police harassment and arrest, many IDUs are not comfortable exchanging syringes at SEPs. Insufficient funding and support of SEPs also limit program breadth and scheduled hours of exchange.

CDHS/OA funded Mendocino, Humboldt, Alameda, Santa Cruz, and Los Angeles Counties to participate in a new intervention entitled, "*Peer-Based HIV Prevention Among Injection Drug Users and Satellite Syringe Exchangers in California*." The program develops enhanced peer-based HIV prevention interventions that facilitate the recruitment and training of IDUs and satellite syringe exchangers (individuals who exchange used syringes for sterile ones on behalf of IDUs). The program helps them become more effective HIV prevention educators among their peers by using harm reduction strategies (i.e., decrease syringe and injection paraphernalia sharing, utilize safer injection practices, practice safer sex, enter drug treatment, etc.). CDHS/OA



provides technical support to the five jurisdictions to facilitate intervention development and implementation. Additionally, an extensive evaluation will help to monitor the public health effectiveness of the projects.

Disease Prevention Demonstration Project

Senate Bill 1159 (Vasconcellos, 2004) was signed by Governor Schwarzenegger on September 20, 2004. The new statute, Health and Safety Code Section 121285, created the Disease Prevention Demonstration Project (DPDP) and allows pharmacies that register with their local health department, to sell ten or fewer hypodermic needles or syringes to individuals without a prescription in jurisdictions that authorize the program.

DPDP requires pharmacies that sell hypodermic needles and syringes to undertake prescribed activities including:

- Offering safe syringe disposal options to ensure that these hypodermic needles and syringes are disposed of in an appropriate manner, and
- Certifying they will provide written information or verbal counseling at the time of sale on how to access drug treatment and testing and treatment of HIV and HCV, and how to safely dispose of sharps waste.

DPDP requires that CDHS convene an evaluation advisory panel comprised of public health experts, law enforcement, pharmacy representatives, and waste management specialists. Together with this advisory panel, CDHS/OA will evaluate the effects of allowing the sale of hypodermic needles or syringes without a prescription, and will submit a report to the Governor and Legislature by January 15, 2010. The provisions of DPDP sunset on December 31, 2010.

Helpful resources:

- For more information on OA's mission, OA programs, and other helpful resources, see Website <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/AIDS>.
- For information about HIV/AIDS, call the:
 - *California AIDS Hotline* at 1 (800) 367-AIDS (English/Spanish/Filipino) or 1 (888) 225-AIDS (TDD) or see Website <http://www.AIDShotline.org>.
- For more information on California Statutes visit the Official California Legislative Information see Website <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>.